

Dance: Ailey Swings Into the Classics

Ev

After Ellington Week, Earlier Works Added

By CLIVE BARNES

To an extent it was business as usual for the Alvin Ailey City Center Dance Theater on Tuesday night. It was opening the second and final week of its Lincoln Center season, which has been called "Ailey Celebrates Ellington."

During the first week we had nothing but works with music by Duke Ellington. However, the repertory is becoming slightly more catholic during this second week and other, earlier pieces from the Ailey Company repertory are being included.

Even here we had a repeat of Talley Beatty's "The Road of the Phoebe Snow," elo-

quently led by Beth Shorter, Michihiko Oka, Donna Wood, Elbert Watson and Peter Woodin. But the rest—apart from the now traditional medley of Duke Ellington Standards played by the Duke Ellington Orchestra zestfully conducted by Mercer Ellington, the composer's son—was non-Ellington. It consisted of three Ailey works, "Streams," his solo for Judith Jamison; "Cry" and Mr. Ailey's fundamentalist classic, "Revelations."

"Streams" with its music by the Czech composer Miloslav Kabelac, now seems somewhat tenuous in its kinetic energy. The choreography certainly moves, but it doesn't seem to move anywhere in particular. The company dance it with an easy charm, but the work,

'Revelations' Remains a Great Experience

now after its possibly initial novelty, hardly compels attention.

"Cry" and "Revelations" are altogether different matters. They are art conventions in the Ailey repertory the one being a solo forever to be associated with the company's principal dancer, Miss Jamison, and the other because it is so clearly the company's signature work.

It is amazing what Miss Jamison can still get out of "Cry," that poean of praise and shout of agony for the black woman now moving through our America. Her body has a style of its own—large, almost awkward, it stealthily bounces its way through music with a kind of somber majesty.

Nothing can be said of "Revelations" that has not been said. It remains Mr. Ailey's best work, and this and dance provides one of the great coreographic experiences of our time.

The company never fails to rise to the occasion of "Revelations," and in the finale it swings its way to a personal heaven that is never less than moving. It was a good performance but perhaps one should specifically mark out Mary Kajiwarra and Clive Thompson in the "Fix Me Jesus" duet and Dudley Williams in the solo "I Want to Be Ready." But in "Revelations" the entire Ailey Company is always fixed and always ready.

Philharmonic to Perform In Scandinavia and Soviet

The New York Philharmonic will give five concerts in Scandinavia and eight in the Soviet Union in an overseas tour beginning Aug. 31 and extending through Sept. 17. Thomas Schippers will conduct one concert each in Helsinki; Malmoe, Sweden; Leningrad and Moscow, and Erich Leinsdorf will conduct the others.

Stanley Drucker, a member of the Philharmonic, will be soloist in Copland's Clarinet Concerto in four of the concerts. Vladimir Spivakov, Soviet violinist, will appear with the orchestra in one Leningrad concert, and Emil Gilels, the Soviet pianist, will be soloist in a Moscow concert.

Before going aboard, the Philharmonic will play three concerts at the Artpark, Lewiston, N. Y., and two at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center between Aug. 24 and 28. Following its return from the Soviet Union, Andre Kostelanetz will lead the orchestra in concerts at the Westchester Premiere Theater (Sept. 22) and the United States Military Academy at West Point (Sept. 25).

owner was on vacation and stole 10 paintings valued at \$550,000, the police said today. The most valuable was a painting of a brown and white King Charles spaniel by George Stubbs, the greatest English animal painter of the 18th century. "It was priced at £140,000 [\$252,000]," said Edward Speelman, owner of the Piccadilly gallery where the burglary took place. He said other works valued at an estimated million were untouched.

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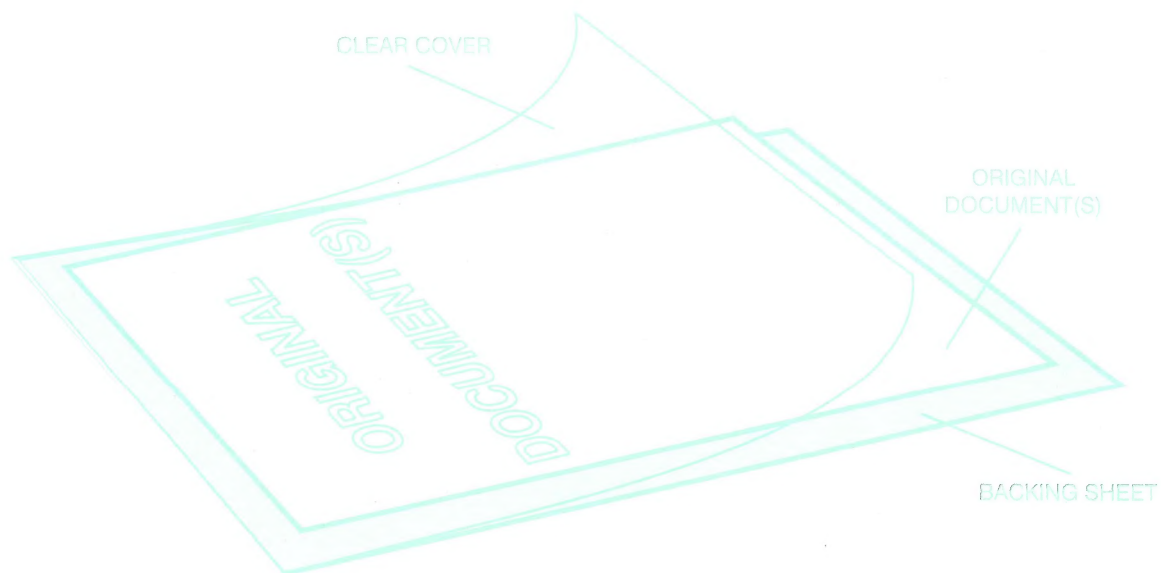
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AILEY'S DANCERS CRACKLING AGAIN

New Performers Blend Into
Troupe as Season Opens

By DON McDONAGH

Sheer performing electricity flashing and crackling around stage is the not-so-secret weapon of the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, which opened its brief two-week season Tuesday night at New York City Center.

At times, one almost wonders whether it matters what company is doing as long as the promise included the warm

familiar "Blue Suite" and "Revelations" along with the newer "Flowers," which saw its first performance in January.

The Ailey company is currently at a fine performing edge with some new faces smoothly blended into the troupe. Interestingly, the male side is slightly stronger on the whole—no mean feat when Judith Jamison leads the female contingent.

Miss Jamison is one of those special performers from whom an audience comes to expect some form of splendid excess. If she is elegant, then it is a shade more elegant than might reasonably be anticipated—and if she chooses to stress the comic, she adds a special twist to it.

In "Revelations," she was the pace-setter in the Processional, and in "The Day Is Past and Gone" section, no one was more flamboyantly friendly or settled quite so comfortably onto a stool than she. Miss Jamison has star quality and uses it with knowingness and grace. So does Dudley Williams. In the solo,

happy, rich. She is a bright girl who has given up school for her career—made a wrong choice, set herself too low a ceiling, as the film rather tiresomely insists.

But in its treatment of the

into virtuoso cinematic force—and I like it for not avoiding virtuosity, but indulging it with a kind of idiomatic modesty and good sense. ROGER GREENSPUN.

"I Want to Be Ready," he concentrates and modulates that energy, which he later unleashes with pulsing effect in the finale, "Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham."

The opening work of the program, "Blues Suite," is the secular twin of the religious-based "Revelations." "Blues Suite" finds its natural setting in the night rather than the day and keeps one anxious ear cocked for the daybreak bell.

Consuelo Atlas with her pouty charm danced the beautiful duet, "Backwater Blues," with the unhurried and confidently masculine Kelvin Rotardier. Neither conceded a psychic inch to the other until being convinced of victory in love.

"Flowers," Mr. Ailey's dance protest over the death of the singer Janis Joplin, has been edited somewhat since its first appearance, but still has preponderance of production rather than movement value. The production, however, is marvelous, especially the light design of Nicola Cernovitch who has anonymous photographers gouging flashlit snapshots out of the life of the heroine.

Lynn Seymour, with compassion and genuine feeling, danced the angry and then drug-buzzed blowsy performer slowly sinking beneath her public success and private anguish. The company supported her handsomely throughout.



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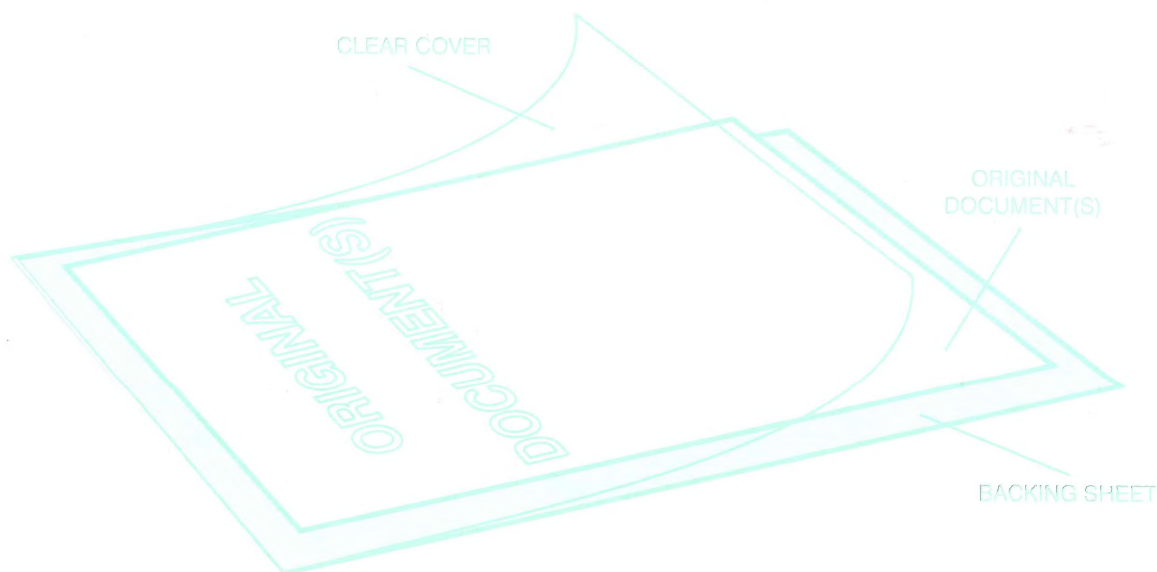
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Dance: Ailey and Feld Troupes Depart

Cast Changes Enliven City Center Weekend

By CLIVE BARNES

Sunday night two dance companies completed their New York spring seasons: The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at the New York City Center and Eliot Feld's American Ballet Company at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

The highly successful Ailey season ended with a final flurry of cast changes over the weekend. This season the Ailey company has adopted a new policy toward casting. It has been offering alternative casting in almost every work, a practice more commonly associated with classic ballet than modern dance.

When Ailey created "Flowers" earlier this year for his Royal Ballet guest artist, Lynn Seymour, this modern tragedy, loosely inspired by the death of Janis Joplin, seemed fundamentally a vehicle for the British ballerina. The impression was strengthened at the beginning of this City Center season, when Miss Seymour returned from London to star in it.

Later, however, Mr. Ailey gave the role to Consuelo Atlas, whom, unfortunately, I missed. Over the weekend

the role was danced by Linda Kent Saturday night and Rosamund Lynn Sunday afternoon.

Miss Kent managed to move the ballet from the specific circumstances of Miss Joplin's death into the much broader area of sudden celebrity and the resultant fracture of a personality—the fall of the sparrow. Her dancing was fine, and her fragility and slow embitterment touching. Miss Lynn, a newcomer to the company from American Ballet Theater, had a toughness from the beginning, which was more appropriate but less appealing. As the super-pimp manager, Kelvin Rotardier is now sharing the role, menacingly enough, with Ramon Segarra.

In Mr. Rotardier's own duet, "Child of the Earth," Sylvia Waters and Clive Thompson danced with a charming lightness of spirit. Mr. Thompson, more mystic and less priestlike than his predecessor, is also sharing with Mr. Rotardier the role of the chief celebrant in "Choral Dances." It was a special pleasure to welcome back Dudley Williams to the title role of Lucas Hoving's "Icarus," for Mr. Williams has this season been beset by an injury, although you would never have guessed it from his performance.

The most important cast change of the season, per-

Farewell Program in Brooklyn Brilliant

haps, came Sunday afternoon, when Miss Atlas danced for the first time Ailey's new solo for Judith Jamison, "Cry."

Miss Atlas was passionate, committed and womanly in this terrific solo that Ailey has dedicated to "all black women everywhere." It did not come, perhaps, as naturally to her as to Miss Jamison, for it is a solo that has been positively sculptured on Miss Jamison's body. The piece still remains a great tour de force of dance and choreography.

Feld and his company departed from Brooklyn Sunday night with a program that included all three of this season's new works, "The Gods Amused," "Romance" and "Theater," and a success from last season, "The Consort." It made a marvelous program.

The more I see of "Theater" the more I like it—it could easily be Feld's most considerable work to date, with its unforced invention, intense theatrically and choreographic resonances of Fokine, the commedia dell'arte and a whole lost romantic world of theater.



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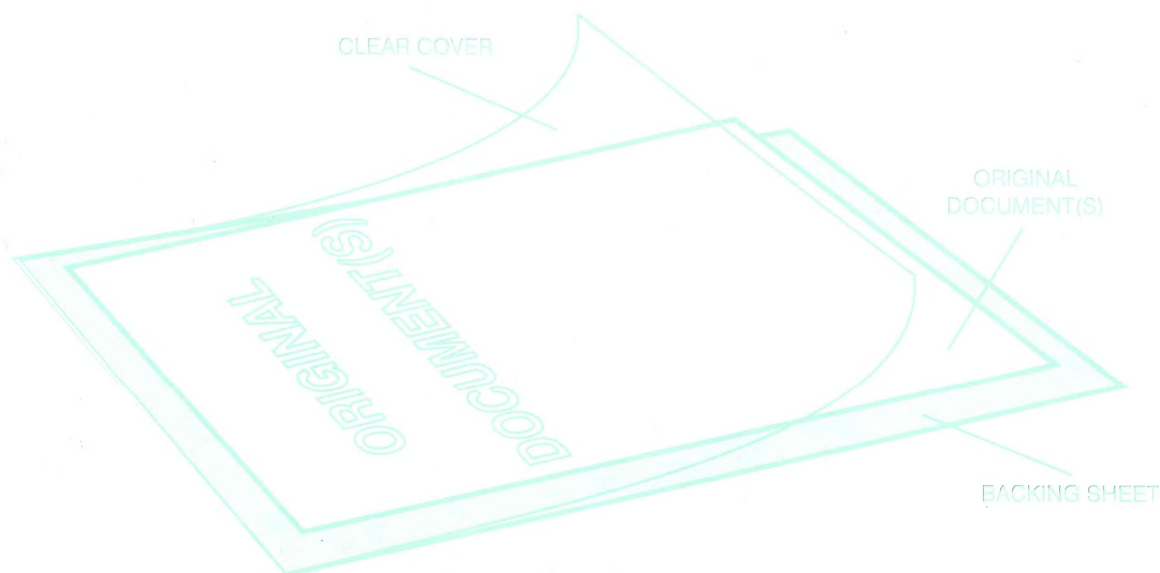
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Dance

DANCE VIEW

CLIVE BARNES

The Ailey Is Becoming Establishment

There is classic ballet, modern-dance and the Alvin Ailey City Center Dance Theater. Of course that is not quite true, but it is true enough to be worth discussing. In many important respects the Ailey troupe is more like the Joffrey Ballet than it is like, say, the Paul Taylor Dance Company or, for that matter, the Martha Graham Dance Company. The major difference is simply enough seen. In the past, modern-dance companies have usually concentrated on the works of one choreographer, very often to the exclusion of all others, such as in the case of Martha Graham (once she did have a couple of works by Erick Hawkins in the repertory, but that was years ago and besides he was her husband at the time) or Merce Cunningham. But although Alvin Ailey has always been the chief choreographer of his company right from its earliest days in 1957, he has consistently employed other choreographers.

Over the years, Ailey has made striking progress toward his ambition of creating some kind of national modern-dance company. His repertory, past and present, includes works by such choreographers as John Butler, José Limón, Donald McKayle, Anna Sokolow, Lester Horton (Ailey's original teacher), Joyce Trisler and Talley Beatty. His company is markedly larger than other modern-dance troupes (it currently has 25 dancers) and, as with quite a number of other modern groups, the thrust of the training is concentrated on classic ballet. Ailey's last three ballet-masters—Ramon Segarra, Fiorella Keane and, the current incumbent, Ali Pourfarrokhi—have all been classically oriented.

In addition to maintaining a catholic repertory of modern-dance standards, Ailey has been particularly concerned to husband works he terms as being "in the black tradition"; as a result, the repertory has been enhanced by ballets and dances by such choreographers as Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus and Louis Johnson. All this time, Ailey himself has been a notably prolific choreographer, turning out works not only for his own company but also for other companies (a couple, for instance, for American Ballet Theater) and for television. Thus, the company has developed a varied and large repertory (one that has something in common in its depth and diversity with that of a classic

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DANCE VIEW

Ailey Becomes Establishment

Continued from Page 11

company). Yet, interestingly enough, the one sure-fire hit in the Ailey camp remains his own celebration of the Negro spiritual, "Revelations," which has been around the place for more than 15 years, although audiences still never tire of its fervor, eloquence and communication of soul-stamping joy.

Is it pure chance that the Ailey company is not only the most classically inclined of modern-dance troupes but also by far the most popular? Certainly its similarity with the classic companies runs quite deep, particularly in such areas as organization and program planning. Unlike most modern-dance companies (although both the Graham and Limón groups have now also moved in this direction) the Ailey programs offer alternative casting in most roles and place considerable emphasis upon star performers, for example, Judith Jamison and Dudley Williams. The company has a hierarchy so well defined that although all the dancers are listed alphabetically on the program, if you watch them take their calls in "Revelations" the close-eyed observer will notice that it is an unspoken company tradition for the dancers to appear in an ascending order of seniority. Yet another, perhaps more fortuitous but surely not less important similarity with the classicists, is the fact that for the most part the Ailey company offers more immediate and accessible music than do most of its contemporaries in modern-dance. The Ailey is just about as *avant garde* as American Ballet Theater, no more and no less.

The inexorable, or at least nowadays seemingly inexorable, move of the Ailey company to become a full fledged member (none of them seems to be a fully paid-up member!) of the dance establishment must bring its toils and pains as well as its benefits and joys. Already the company can give seven to eight weeks in New York City alone, and it is in demand for touring, both at home and abroad. Yet the company, like every major arts institution in America, is plagued with financial worries. Also the Ailey has to face up to quite a few major artistic and administrative problems in the next few years.

Creatively the future for the company appears to be quite clearly charted. Obviously the pattern will be to continue the preservation and conservation task the company has set itself in the field of modern-dance and the black experience, as well as the creation of new works within the self-defining artistic policy of the company's past.

The first week of the company's current season at the City Center 55th Street Theater showed two new productions, each of which comfortably fell within the group's artistic aims. We had a revival of John Butler's paradise-lost-and-found duet, "After Eden," sensuously danced by Sara Yarborough and Christopher Aponte, and the premiere of a new Ailey work to Ellington music, "The Mooche."

The latter is a superb piece of show-biz staging and Broadway-style evocation, a nostalgic tribute to four black artists associated with the composer: Florence Mills, Marie Bryant, Mahalia Jackson and Bessie Smith. With its marvelously dense and rich Ellington music (most of it from the late twenties) this is a monument to the nightclub era. Its magic-box, mirrored setting by Rouben Ter-Arutunian and its almost adulatory show-model costumes by Randy Barcelo help produce a ballet that is both chic and imaginative. However, it is stronger on production values than choreography.



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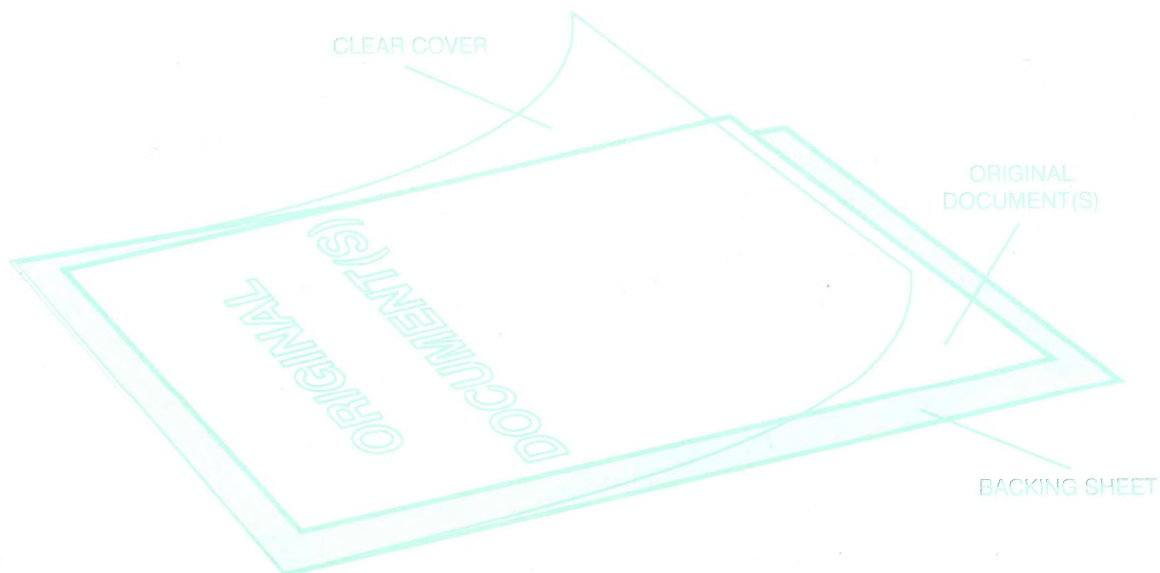
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The Dance: Judith Jamison's Triumph

Ailey's 'Cry' Depicts the Black Woman's Ordeal

By CLIVE BARNES

For years it has been obvious that Judith Jamison is no ordinary dancer. She looks like an African goddess and her long body has an unexpected gracefulness to it, but it moves in a manner almost more elemental than human. Her face is fantastic. It is a long Modigliani face, like a black sculpture. It is a tragic face, a mask of sorrow. It is a face born to cry the blues, but when she smiles it is with an innocent radiance, a joyfulness that is simple and lovely. And she dances with an articulated beauty, serene, together and womanly. She holds herself a little aloof from the audience, but she is reserved rather than shy. She never tries consciously to please an audience. She is wonderfully proud, from the poise of her head set perfectly on a long, strong neck, to the lightly sculptured muscles of her long legs.

So for years it has been obvious that Judith Jamison was no ordinary dancer. Now Alvin Ailey has given his African queen a solo that wonderfully demonstrates what she is and where she is. It was given its world premiere at the New York City Center Tuesday night, and it was a sensation. Rarely have a choreographer and dancer been in such accord.

The Program
(Premiere): Music, Alice Coltrane; choreography, Alvin Ailey; lighting, Chennault Spence. Presented by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at the City Center on West 55th Street. With Judith Jamison.

"Cry." Ailey has dedicated it: "For all black women everywhere—especially our mothers." You can see why, for here crystallized is the story of the black woman in America told with an elliptic and cryptic poetry and a passionate economy of feeling.

The solo is in three parts—the first set to Alice Coltrane's "Something About John Coltrane," the second to Laura Nyro's "Been on a Train" and the last has The Voices of East Harlem singing "Right On, Be Free." To these three very different moods of music, Ailey and Miss Jamison (for this had to be to some extent a creative collaboration) have made three views of the black woman, which might be summed up, albeit unsubtly, as African roots, urban despair and finally black freedom.

Jazz Music a Contrast to Timeless Images

the measured and flamboyant choreography.

Blues is the color of black, and Laura Nyro's blues-impregnated "Been on a Train" about dope addiction suggests not only the Southern blacks' flight to the North, but also the cities of pain, the anguish of release and the time for despair.

Finally, Miss Jamison and Ailey give us their version of black power and black pride in "Right On, Be Free," and Ailey once more touches that special revivalist fervor that is one of the key elements in his work.

Miss Jamison dances with great control, and although her work has obviously been greatly influenced, via Ailey, the Lester Horton West Coast style (at times her style can resemble that of an angry Carmen de Lavallade, who like Ailey was a former Horton pupil) it is also strongly tinged with classic dance. The result, added to her lithe and statuesque physique, is fascinating. The simplicity of the staging was exemplary, and the lighting by Chennault Spence made a most telling contribution in varying the effect of each section and matching the work's flavor. Because "Cry" is a solo, even though a formidably long one, its importance could easily be overlooked. But it certainly wasn't by the first-night audience, which applauded and cheered it for nearly 10 minutes.

Solomons Brings Glamour of Dance To Judson Church

The dances of Gus Solomons Jr. usually titillate the mind at the same time they caress the eye with a flow of long limbed and neatly phrased images, by turns athletic and provocative. Tuesday evening at Judson Memorial Church Mr. Solomons added an unexpected element to his work, glamour.

It was not the flossy, dispiriting variety but the mysterious type that has staying power, lingering in the memory after the initial allure has passed. The dance was "Urban Recreation/The Ultimate Pastoral." It engaged four girls—Margaret Reals Randall Faxon and Jean

tyre—and their attentive mentor, Mr. Solomons.

At the beginning the girls moved in small right-angled circuits through passageways formed by nine columns. The columns were pushed away and the dance expanded to fill the performing area with a series of trios, solos and full group dances. Then it was compacted into the small space originally delimited by the absent columns.

It was a dance that began with glimpses of scattered action and ended with everything drawn into a precise, dense and unobscured space. The pulse alternated between the languid and the staccato, and created a feeling of solemn ease contrasted with decorous urgency.

The two other new works on the program were a duet, "On Par," and a humorous dance, "Title Meet," regulated with carefully timed group actions in the manner of a silent drill

This could pinpoint a danger for the company, as could, to be frank, Ailey's proposal to produce an Ellington festival next year for the Bicentennial, which would feature 13 ballets. It could well be that Ailey's Ellington celebration will be the company's greatest moment so far—one hopes so—but how much Ellington (or for that matter Stravinsky or Ravel) can a well-balanced repertory absorb? And will most of the ballets be thrown away after the festival is over? We will see. For all that, it sounds a far more cheerful and creative Bicentennial project than the others I have heard of so far. At least it looks to the future rather than our theatrical and musical past.

There is also another problem looming ahead for the Ailey company. Is it to stay at the City Center or move? American Ballet Theater has announced its plans—at a staggering but still modest cost of 10 million dollars—to get a newly refurbished opera-house-style theater on 34th Street, the Manhattan Center. I think Ballet Theater will pull the project off; I hope so, because we desperately need another dance theater and the present City Center is definitely inadequate. Presumably the Joffrey Ballet (although making startled noises at the moment) will, given the chance, move with Ballet Theater into the new house. The choice for the Ailey company is more complex. The City Center could possibly be forced—with regret—to close the 55th Street Theater if the Manhattan Center came into being. The Ailey might move with Ballet Theater, but it already has a toe-hold at Lincoln Center's State Theater, and with Ballet Theater moving out of there, it might do better to extend its Lincoln Center seasons. Whatever happens, the Alvin Ailey City Center Dance Theater is a growth industry, a company on the move.



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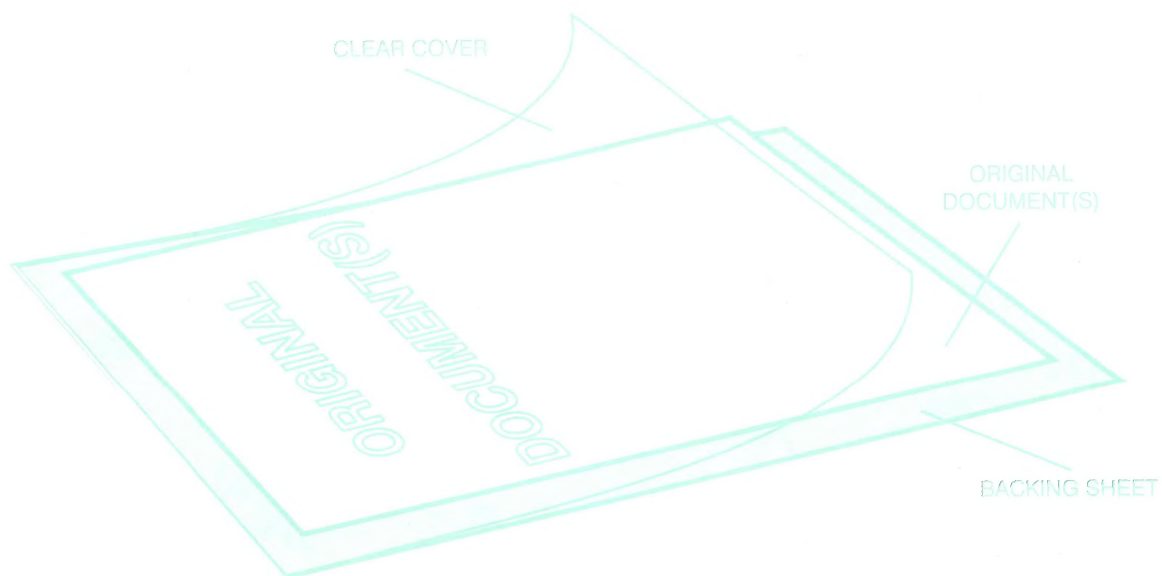
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The Dance: 'Hidden Rites'

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

In his newest work, given its premiere Thursday night at the City Center, Alvin Ailey takes us into some mythical Afro-Asian kingdom and offers an odd music-hall view of what takes place in such realms.

"Hidden Rites," to a conventional rather than avant-garde percussion score by Patrice Sciortino ("Les Cyclopes"), was excellently danced by the Alvin Ailey City Center Dance Theater, but it is still—as a subtitle warns—"a work in progress." Mr. Ailey has never been loath to change his mind about his own ballets and the result has always been improvement. "Hidden Rites," it can be assumed, is in that transitional stage.

The new nine-part work falls into that compartment of the Ailey repertory that includes "Streams," "Myth," "Choral Dances" and "Archipelago." Whatever their dissimilarities, these works share a deliberate ritual cast. Under the guise of pure movement, relationships and emotional states are depicted, often without the audience's being immediately aware of them. "Streams," for instance, ends with a final statement about love that includes both homo-

sexual and heterosexual relationships.

Thus, while "Hidden Rites" appears to consist of movement passages—groups, solos and duets—that refer eventually to fertility rituals, the less obvious motif concerns the survival of the fittest that governs all Darwinian societies. Somewhere, among all those diagonal spatial patterns, blends of Oriental and African dance postures and Mr. Ailey's own fusion of jazz, modern and ballet idioms, we see the weak stomped by the strong and an acceptance of such as the order of things in this world.

One wishes Mr. Ailey's choreographic invention in this work would always be up to the level of his interesting ideas or of such isolated passages as the erotic and powerful duet superbly performed by Clive Thompson and Tina Yuan in the "Of Love" section.

As the two deities who preside over these rites of initiation, mating and death, Judith Jamison and John Parks have less successful choreography but are part of a top-flight cast that is led also by Mari Kajiwaras as the victim, Hector Mercado as her mate, Kenneth Pearl as the initiate, Freddy Romero and Syliva Waters.

Dance: 'Phoebe Snow'

Ailey Troupe Gives Anxious Portrait of Life on Wrong Side of Tracks

By DON McDONAGH

The Phoebe Snow, that legendary train, had a smooth and easy road, quite unlike the difficult, agitated paths of those who lived near its right of way. The Alvin Ailey City Center Dance Company presented "The Road of the Phoebe Snow" as the opening work of its third program on Tuesday evening at the New York State Theater.

Talley Beatty, who created the piece, made it a rough, anxious portrait of life on the wrong side of the tracks, where predatory strength is an asset. Enid Britton and Michihiko Oka were the innocent couple who danced together tenderly but who were torn apart by stronger, tougher citizens. Miss Britton's energetic resistance and flight were strong images of real panic, and Mr. Oka's determined fight for her safety was presented with brooding intensity and a hint of desperation.

Donna Wood and Elbert Watson were the exploitive couple who represented more the rule than the exception in relationships between men and women. Miss Wood had a broad expansive attack that promises much for the future as she moves into more roles. In addition to gestural force, she had a delicacy of accent that crossed the "t's" and dotted the "i's" of the choreography suavely.

Mr. Watson seemed a bit more unidimensional in his straightforward aggressiveness, always relying on a trust surliness when in doubt. Despite good individual performances, the over-all group dances lacked the tautness required to make the piece throb convincingly.

Dudley Williams danced a brief solo from "Love Songs" that reminded us once again just how supple and musically sensitive a dancer he is. Taking a popular song, he played with its rhythms and rode on its phrasing like an assured aerialist, always skirting the edge of danger and always in perfect control.

Sara Yarborough's interpretation of John Butler's

"Portrait of Billie" was its usual sleek, elegant self, and Ulysses Dove was the mean-mannered representative of the men in her life. The evening closed with "Revelations," which for the Ailey company is what gold is for Fort Knox. The performance was strong. Among the soloists one remembers Miss Wood and Kelvin Rotardier especially in the "Fix Me, Jesus" duet.

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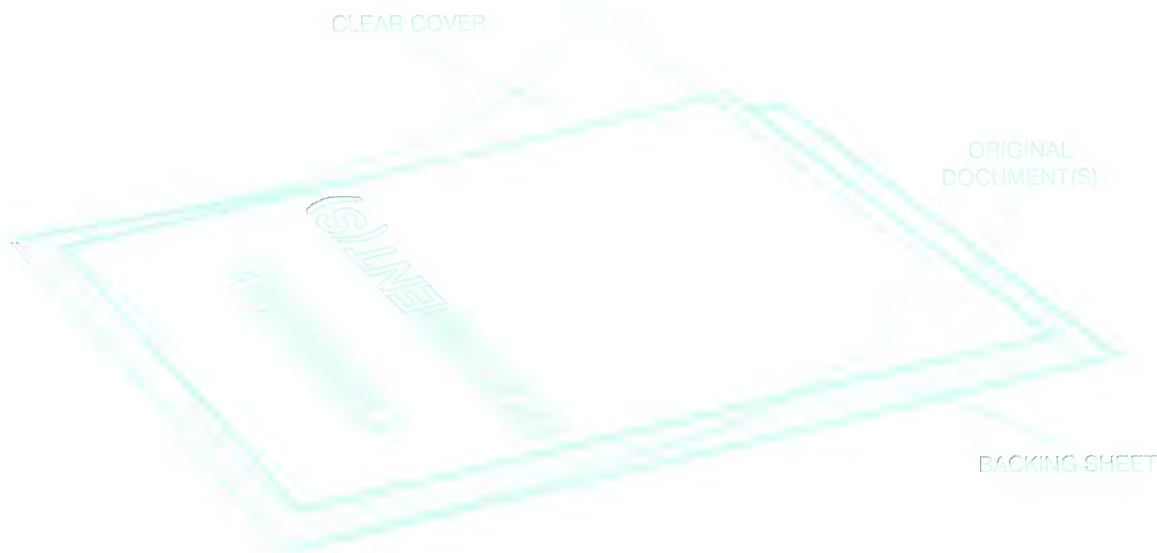
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Dance: 'Night Creature'

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

"Night Creature," Alvin Ailey's new dance work to Duke Ellington's score of the same name, is very different from "The Mooche," the other Ailey piece to Ellington that is being presented during the Alvin Ailey City Center Dance Theater's current season.

Both were conceived as part of a television special, shown last November, and in view of Mr. Ailey's Ellington Festival for the Bicentennial. At its premiere at the iCity Center Tuesday evening, "Night Creature" turned out to be one of Mr. Ailey's best works in the jazz-ballet vein, a genre not as easy to capture as it is hard to lick.

If the two Ellington premieres this season are so unlike each other it is because their scores are different. "Night Creature" was commissioned from Ellington in 1955 by the Symphony of the Air, and its classicism has been heard very well by Mr. Ailey in what is really his most classical ballet.

Unsurprisingly, "Night Creature" has some marked resemblances to "The River," which Mr. Ailey created to a commissioned Ellington score for American Ballet Theater. Some of the same images are repeated here—the high partnered arabesque lifts for the women and the encircling "love" passages in the new work's second section that echo the "Lake" passage of "The River."

"Night Creature" is shorter, more coherent and less episodic than Mr. Ailey's "The River" although the first of its three movements includes fleeting references to the battle of the sexes: A woman's kick hurtling a man backward, a quivering male carried off by a Thurber-like female.

But generally, Mr. Ailey presents these night creatures, 15 dancers in Jane Greenwood's tie-dyed bluish sequined costumes, as just dancers. The movement idiom is a superb blend of jazz-dance's suppersell approach

The Program

NIGHT CREATURE. Music, Duke Ellington; choreography, Alvin Ailey; costumes, Jane Greenwood; lighting, Chénault Spence. Presented by the Alvin Ailey City Center Dance Theater at the City Center 55th Street Theater. With: Tina Yuan, Dudley Williams, Kelvin Rotardier and Enid Britten, Charles Adams, Mari Kaijawa, Warren Spears, Estelle Spurlack, Elbert Watson, Sarita Allen, Masazumi Chaya, Beth Shorter, Michihiko Oka, Jodi Mocca and Melvin Jones.

toned down by the discipline of academic ballet. Usually these two idioms—jazz and ballet—have worked against each other when other choreographers (and sometimes Mr. Ailey himself) have aimed at their fusion. But here he succeeds.

Tina Yuan, partnered by Dudley Williams in the first movement, was splendid in what was actually a full ballerina role. The second movement is the most effective. It is starting how Mr. Ailey gets away with it—all those girls doing their développés into arabesques penchés, not to speak of their entrechats, assemblés and brisés and still being part of the hip-jutting wiggling pulse that colors the entire ballet.

In this section with its bouncing beautiful image of a cluster of dancers that moves as one unit, Miss Yuan was joined by Kelvin Rotardier, whose sleek personal style was seen to great advantage here, Warren Spears and Michihiko Oka were two other dancers who well deserved those moments when the audience suddenly broke into applause.

On the same program, the season's first performances of "portrait of Billie" and Mr. Ailey's "Feast of Ashes" showed the Ailey company in dramatic works. Sara Yarborough and Ulysses Dove succeeded in giving John Butler's tribute to Billie Holiday some substance. But while Miss Yuan, Clive Thompson and Judith Jamison were excellent in Mr. Ailey's version of Garcia Lorca's "The House of Bernarda Alba," it is one of Ailey ballets that look better on a real ballet company.

Ailey Dance: Getting Off To an Ellingtonian Start

By DON McDONAGH

Ailey and Ellington could start any party off at a high level and with "Night Creature" they opened the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater season Wednesday night in a shower of good feelings. The City Center 55th Street Theater had a festive atmosphere that permeated the whole program. There were lots of things to celebrate and the company showed its best performing manners.

It took Alvin Ailey 20 years to decide to choreograph "Night Creature," which was composed in 1955. But the result was the product of care and concern. It was one of the important steps that paved the way for the Duke Ellington Festival that celebrated the composer's talent during the Bicentennial year. Mr. Ailey has selected several of Ellington's scores to work with over the years but showed a marked rapport with this one.

The voluptuous woman who led the company on the serpentine chase was Sarita Allen, twisting and turning from one admirer to another. Sociability became a predatory exercise as she first linked herself with Dudley Williams and passed him by for a dalliance with Melvin Jones. The switch back to Mr. Williams was carried out as easily as flicking off a switch. There was a heartlessness in the dance but the energy covered up its casual toying with human affections. Everyone knew that it wasn't a kid's game, though it seemed like one at times.

Sara Yarborough made it clear that she was home and happy in her first appearance with the company since her return. The occasion was the edgy duet with the logical but convoluted name, "The Time Before The Time After (After The Time Before)." Prizes should be awarded for being able to say it correctly three times in succession or even just once.

Choreographer Lar Lubovitch took

mutual dependence as his starting point for the couple who fought rather than switched. Miss Yarborough was partnered by Mel Tomlinson and there is no doubt that they have a performing spark. He was the attractive brute and she the helplessly attracted woman who knew better but could never quite bring herself to part. They scrapped and embraced in a circle of dependence that gave the dance its cyclical title. Miss Yarborough was razor sharp in attack, arresting herself for dramatic pauses and surging toward him despite her better instincts. Mr. Tomlinson's long powerful build added an element of menace to what was already a dangerously violent duet. His sure catches and calculated abuse underlined the tender and tough aspects of the part, and he looked to be capable of any cruelty if it suited him. It was lust rather than love that drove them together and would continue to do so.

"Suite Otis" celebrated the sassy and heartfelt music of the late Otis Redding. George Faison, its choreographer, selected a clutch of his tunes to string together a series of vignettes. The men were cocky and the women defiant in a come-hither way and Donna Wood expressed the anguish of "One More Day" with passionate intensity. Marilyn Banks and Carl Paris humorously danced cheek-to-cheek, during which she rebuffed his awkward advances but kept him coming back to try once more. High turning lifts by all five couples in unison brought it all to a close. There was no special story other than that of men and women meeting, parting and pairing to Louis Falco's "Caravan."

A sad note in the program reminded us that we have just recently lost Thelma Hill, a dancer, teacher and energetic organizer. Mr. Faison lost a close friend and dedicated the dance to her. The picture of her laughing in class recalls her exceptional skill at doing a difficult job with warmth. Those with long memories will remember her in the first performances of "Revelations" and recall her special relationship to the Ailey company.

12/2/77



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Ailey Enhances Audience Appeal With 'Suite Otis'

By DON McDONAGH

The effect of a great closing ballet can be felt repeatedly at the box office, and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has always had "Revelations" to bring delighted audiences back. With the presentation of George Faison's "Suite Otis" this season, it has another piece with similar foot-tapping energy and audience appeal. The company brought a somewhat subdued program Friday evening to an exciting close with the suite at the City Center 55th Street Theater.

The work is simpleness itself—five incidents based on as many recordings by the late Otis Redding. There are women alone, men alone and then the humorous and amorous mingling of the two. Donna Wood, who was featured in three of the four dances of the evening, sparkled in "Suite Otis" as the soulful, lonely woman in the midst of comforters, and later as the demanding leader of the pack who didn't get any satisfaction. She was lovely and convincing in both roles.

The men were funny, strutting braggarts and made to order targets for the women's loud scorn. Marilyn Banks chattered up an eloquent storm of taunts that didn't keep her from falling into the arms of Carl Paris anyway. In a way, the secret of the ballet is its ability to incorporate contention and

never lose its basic good feelings about men and women and the funny things they do to torment one another in the name of love.

Mr. Faison's other ballet on the program was "Gazelle" a fragment of a longer narrative work that traced the forced emigration of black Africans to the Americas. As a fragment it was not very satisfactory, though Miss Wood had a juicy solo as the hunted creature.

Mr. Paris, Melvin Jones, Charles Adams and Alistair Butler were the relentless hunters who brought her home to the village. Ironically, they were hunted in the same ruthless fashion by slavers and hauled from their native haunts. The transition between the sections was not particularly smooth, and the rest of the ballet does much to put these early parts into perspective. Without the subsequent scenes "Gazelle" was left dangling inconclusively.

Sara Yarborough's rendering of Mr. Ailey's "Cry" was poignant but with-

out that searing emotionalism that the role can have. She was knowingly hurt, intelligently resilient and always in complete control of the character, except that one wished she might surrender a bit more to the possibilities of emotional excess to vivify the part. Miss Yarborough placed a technical check on a part that would benefit from less thinking and more instinct.

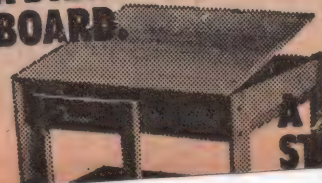
The program saw the first appearance of Jennifer Muller's "Crossword" this season. The piece's premise is that dancers with letters on their backs can make words with them and perform little dance movements to demonstrate them. "Supine" found six men and women lying on their sides and "Gone" preceded an exit and so on and so on for a very long time—for far longer than the modest joke really warranted.

The set, a large crossword puzzle and clues, and the costumes by Randy Barcelo were striking but little else was. Dudley Williams and Miss Wood as "across" and "down" got lost in the hurly-burly of the rushing letters.

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2 Dancers Go From Z to A For Alvin Ailey

By DON McDONAGH

Sara Yarborough and Donna Wood are doomed to finish last in any alphabetical cast listings, but on stage they easily occupy the top line. Both dancers gave impressive back-to-back performances Thursday evening at City Center's 55th Street Theater as Alvin Ailey's American Dance Theater presented "Portrait of Billie" and "Cry."

Miss Yarborough's vision of Billie Holiday essentially presents us with a portrait of the lady, relating directly to the sophisticated, almost demure, quality of Miss Holiday's singing style. John Butler, who choreographed the dance more than a decade ago, split her tangled life into three major elements—restless youth, the bitter experience of love, and drug dependence in the glare of popular success. In each element Miss Yarborough gave us Miss Holiday holding onto her dignity as life did all in its power to take it away.

The saucy young girl prowling around looking for action became disenchanted with her lover and boldly threw her shoes at him. Then, changing her mind, she grasped his shoulder and kept him from leaving. Miss Yarborough invested these simple gestures with commanding authority and then just as easily melted into the arms of her man. When love soured, she banished him and turned to drugs for comfort. The recorded sound of nightclub applause and a glaring spotlight made her recoil as if struck with a whip, and she completed the dance like a hunted creature.

The final portion of the work, with its bitter private agony and public acclaim, was tense, tough, and touched with helpless tenderness. It's one of the most effective portrayals that Miss Yarborough has in her repertory. Ulysses Dove danced the insensitive lover with sympathy.

Miss Wood's progress has been noticeable from season to season and "Cry" is the sort of vehicle that presents a special challenge to an emerging dancer. It is craftsmanly in organization; but not particularly inspired. It is a work that relies on its interpreter quite heavily, and, in this case, quite happily.

Miss Wood has energy, arms that extend in serpentine curves and an all-out attack that demands attention. She launched strongly into the solo from the first moment on stage and continued strongly until the curtain descended on her relentlessly moving figure at the end. There was never a hint of relaxation in intensity, and the piece benefited. Miss Wood's recklessness and drive were made for the part.

"Choral Dances" opened the program and Mr. Ailey's perpetual hit, "Revelations," closed it.

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Though a limit of two tickets an order was imposed, the orders were far more than could be filled.

Mr. Horowitz and Eugene Ormandy, will conduct the concert, are donating their services for the benefit of the New York Philharmonic Society; the event is expected to raise \$160,000.

Dance: Alvin Ailey Offers a Variation on Detente

By CLIVE BARNES

FOR THE THIRD year in succession the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater staged a Spring Gala at the City Center 55th Street Theater in aid of Boys Harbor and itself—two very different but very desirable charities, not the least of which was the one that began at home. The gala was on Wednesday night and marked the opening of the Ailey company's spring season.

There was a world premiere, a solo choreographed by Milton Myers for Judith Jamison, called "The Wait," and a New York premiere, Jennifer Muller's "Crossword." Yet in what might be called an extracurricular fashion, the evening's main interest perhaps centered on a duet that was also having its New York premiere, "El Río y El Bosque," or "The River and the Woods." The interest was not entirely choreographic.

It was choreographed by Alberto Mendez and danced by Maria Elena Llorente and Lazaro Carreño. The dance was introduced by Harry Belafonte (other celebrities who handled introductions were Henry Aaron and Judy Collins), who pointed out the po-

are of a high level, and these two, both Varna prize-winners, are no exceptions. If the Cuban choreography deserved few plaudits, it must be conceded that the American entries did not come off a great deal better. Mr. Myers's solo for Miss Jamison looks pretty enough. She is dressed up in a flouncy, lemon gown and a yellow picture hat, unused, hangs on a chair. There is a back projection of a high window, and the impression is given of some kind of antechamber.

The dance is set to Vivaldi, and it has Miss Jamison contracting muscles in a pleasantly Baroque way, showing the lovely harmony of her asymmetric arm movements. But although the ballet is called "The Wait," one does idly wonder what she is waiting for. A lover possibly? Choreography, perhaps?

Miss Muller's "Crossword" is more considerable. Indeed, it is very cute. --but cuteness is not always enough. It is the kind of ballet that is fun to see once, although it is not inconceivable that twice will have to take care of itself.

Decoratively, it is ingenious. The designer, Randy Barcelo, has devised a set with a blank crossword puzzle at the back and clues—across and down—forming the wings. There are two ceremony-persons (is that now the

Dudley Williams who is "Across," Peter Wooden is named "No. 2" and appears to be wielding a giant pencil that he can use either for a little pole-vaulting or directing traffic. The dancers all have letters on their backs, and in the course of their moves they spell out simple words in something of the way of a choreographic Scramble. At times the actions fit the word—such as when the dancers forming the word S-U-P-E-R-N-E lie on the ground.

Well, there have been ballets created on chess and on poker, so why not crossword puzzles—or even mah-jongg? The difficulty is that Miss Muller's choreography is something of a lexicographical hustle, full of leaps and dashes and a great deal of perky humor, yet conceived in a somewhat monotonous dance style.

The program ended with a magnificent performance of "Revelations," in which Mr. Williams showed once more what a great artist he is. Incidentally, the Cuban guest artists have been unexpectedly scheduled for four more performances—two tomorrow, and again next Tuesday and Wednesday. It is a welcome gesture of feet across the sea.



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MIXED FEELINGS

"...With new works to perform, the Ailey company looked fine. With old material, the Limón troupe fared less well..."

TALLEY BEATTY HAS COME UP WITH three-quarters of a terrific work for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, in residence at the City Center through December 19. It's called *The Stack-Up*, after the L.A.-freeway phenomenon in which speeding cars converge in alarming labyrinths.

We're in a crowded disco, where people in sleazy satins, tight pants or sassy skirts in colors that hurt the eyes, gyrate to the raucous music of the hour. Their movement is wide, wild, and hot. Their smiles are brilliant, their attitude is up, but their bodies throb to the relentless beat with a ferocity and tension that spell despair.

In the adagio that follows, individual characters come into focus: a gang of three street toughs and a small, wiry girl wearing club shirts slashed with lightning bolts; a pair of vulnerable young lovers dressed in quiet sky blue, and a tall, taut-muscled loner who stalks them warily. At first he seems just a sad voyeur—after the sweethearts' innocent secrets. Only when he's left in isolation and slowly flexes his arm, making a vein bulge for the needle's hit, do we understand they're his prey.

The crowd reassembles for a round of strobe-lit dancing so frenetic it takes them a while to realize that, in their midst, the boy in blue is freaking. Here Beatty achieves a remarkable description of a bad trip—from the inside. When the hands of the boy's friends grope for him, we share his sensation of erratic whip lashings; when his girl friend tries to shake him back to reason, we're one with his crazy impulse to savage her.

But in the course of this hallucinatory scene, the choreographer loses track of the dance he started out to make. From being essentially a pure-movement work, enriched with suggestions of character and incident, the piece turns into explicit narrative, with a heavy-handed overlay of social criticism. It is not the business of dance critics to tell choreographers *how* to do their work differently and better, yet I must admit I longed to get my hands on this ballet and begin by junking the last five minutes.

Beatty couldn't have asked for better

performers. Keith McDaniel, Marilyn Banks, and Gary DeLoatch are the stars, but everyone manages to be both terrifying and stylish.

Ailey's own new work, *Satyriade*—set to Ravel's lush Introduction and Allegro for Harp, String Quartet, Flute, and Clarinet—makes a fine foil for the Beatty. It forsakes contemporary reality for a dream forest where three goateed hunters (or satyrs, to give the title credence) come upon their sleeping nymphs—a trio of Grecian-gowned beauties. Awakened, the women, whose every move is a curve, entice the virile

performers. Keith McDaniel, Marilyn Banks, and Gary DeLoatch are the stars, but everyone manages to be both terrifying and stylish.

Still, the mawkish commemorative program was not altogether encouraging. It hung on much sincere but embarrassing blather from stellar alumni about "José's" humanist concerns—as if



High, wide, and handsome: Ailey dancers in Talley Beatty's new piece, *The Stack-Up*.

intruders; resistance is just one of their allurements. After each couple explores the theme of sensual pursuit, the six frolic together until the moment of ecstasy, when the men vanish, leaving the women recumbent again—drowsing or swooning. The gloss on Nijinsky's *Afternoon of a Faun* adds a piquant touch for the learned dance fan. And there's a delicious touch in the casting of a black, a white, and an Oriental woman as the nymphs: the majestic Donna Wood, the lyrical Maxine Sherman, and Mari Kajiwara of the knee-length hair. Together they are so captivating you hardly notice the silliness of their material.

THE BIG NIGHT IN THE José Limón Dance Company's engagement at the Joyce Theater—which will run through De-

cember 19—was the gala marking the thirty-fifth anniversary of the troupe's founding and the tenth anniversary of Limón's death. The mere feat of survival calls for celebration. It is evidence that the repertory and style of a modern-dance giant may endure after the passing of the choreographer and the original performers whose distinctive personalities seemed essential to the work.

To my mind, Limón was not much of a thinker, and not that much of a dance-maker. In both areas he substituted the sweeping gesture for rigor and invention, and reiterated points that were essentially banal. But there is no question that his own dancing carried everything before it. It is a pity that the current generation preserving his work has not inherited his scale and intensity. Carla Maxwell, the group's artistic director, and Nina Watt, another veteran practitioner, are lovely, sensitive artists,

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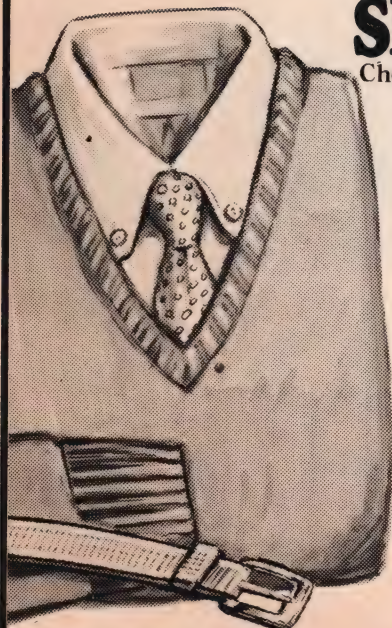
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but they work in miniature; and promising newcomers, like Henry Daniel, instinctively match their dancing to those polite proportions. Only Clyde Morgan, returning to do one of the American Indian solos in *The Unsung*, moved with the kind of stature that can validate the Limón legend.

AMERICA IS NO PARADISE OF COMPETENT choreography, but I am beginning to agree with the Mitford girls' Fa that "abroad is bloody." There was nothing downright despicable in the third entry in the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Ballet International series—already an improvement over the Norwegian and Swedish installments. But two solid evenings of works by the three house choreographers of the **Dutch National Ballet** convinced me to strike Amsterdam off my list of foreign dance capitals.

Toer van Schayk, the least gifted of the trio, underpins his work with elaborate conceits. Admittedly, European audiences encourage this sort of fancifulness more than we do here, but surely there's something amiss when a dance's perfume lies largely in its program note. Van Schayk's *A Garden Unkempt* makes its dancers look exquisite for 5 minutes, and exquisitely dull for the next 23, during which we can recall that the ballet "was inspired partly by the truly haunting beauty of Mozart's D minor quartet, the richness of its sound which seems, even at its most ecstatic moments, to filter through an overlaying film of deep, yet mild melancholy."

Hans van Manen, the most celebrated of the three, is the most cerebral. His ballets look as if they've been conceived on graph paper, then daubed with viciousness to give them some semblance of life. *Piano Variations II*, a duet to Prokofiev's "Sarcasms," reveals van Manen's hate-envy relationship to Balanchine's stark, "advanced" works. Almost everything he does exposes his view of women as an ugly threat. His 5 *Tangos* is an exception: It has warmth, feeling, even some wit. Van Manen is aided here by the rhythms of Astor Piazzolla's bandonion music, by the juicy performance of Jeanette Vondersaar as the chief señorita, and by the dark dignity of Jan Linkens and Leo Besseling as the caballeros who like each other best.

Rudi van Dantzig makes the company's extremely able, attractive dancers look splendid in his *Dialogues*, to early Webern pieces. This ballet has its pretensions, too, most of them scenic. It was the most original and absorbing item on the agenda, though, combining modern and classical movement as if they were tractable partners. Its stage picture is almost always interesting, if sometimes self-consciously so, and the central pas de deux actually has some new things to say about coupling. ■

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER'S HISTORY

- 1958 - Company's formation and first performance at New York City's Kaufman Auditorium
- 1962 - First U.S. State Department tour (Southeast Asia, the Far East and Australia)
- 1963 - Company performs at Rio de Janiero International Arts Festival
- 1964 - European debut in Paris and London
- 1966 - Company participates in First World Festival of Negro Arts, held in Dakar, Senegal; followed by 9-week African tour
- 1967 - The Swedish Broadcasting Company commissions Ailey Ballet "Riedaiglia" for television special. Program subsequently receives the Gran Prix Italia
- 1970 - Second State Department tour (North Africa, Europe)
 - First modern dance company to tour the Soviet Union
 - Company receives a Gold Medal at the International Festival held in Paris
- 1971 - Company begins its affiliation with the City Center of Music and Drama (its New York home base)
- 1976 - Ailey/Ellington Bicentennial Celebration at New York State Theater
- 1977 - Company performs at the Presidential Inauguration
 - Triumphant round-the-world tour
- 1978 - Extensive tour of Latin America
 - Company celebrates its 20th Anniversary with Gala at New York City Center featuring artists from the past
- 1979 - Alvin Ailey received the prestigious Capezio Award
- 1980 - Extensive tour of Japan, partially sponsored by the Nippon Cultural Centre
- 1981 - The Company performed at the Tivoli Festival in Copenhagen, Denmark and was immediately invited back
 - The Company undertook its second tour of Latin America including Mexico, Columbia, Brazil, Chile and Argentina
 - The Company premiered the ABC Arts Cable Network in March with a ninety minute special, "Ailey Dances"
- 1982 - Alvin Ailey received the United Nations Peace Medal

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**THE NEWEST MARVEL ON
NEW YORK'S SKYLINE IS
PRIMA DONNA WOOD,
DANCER EXTRAORDINAIRE**



"The last thing I want people to feel when I'm dancing is, 'Oh, isn't that pretty!'" says Donna Wood (across the Hudson from Manhattan). "I want them to feel something deeper than that."

Her body is wrong for a dancer. She is too tall (5'8"), too heavy (128 pounds) and too ample of bosom and hip. In a field dominated by washboard-ribbed seraphs, Donna Wood is obviously—and gloriously—made from this mortal clay. But all that womanliness hasn't

stopped her from bounding barefoot to the top in the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, a Manhattan troupe officially without stars but with acknowledged standouts. "She is," says her friend, Ailey graduate Judith Jamison, "one of the best dancers in the world. I don't

mean black dancers. I don't mean modern dancers. I mean *dancers*."

Since Jamison's defection to the Broadway musical *Sophisticated Ladies*, the breathtakingly statuesque Wood, 27, has taken over her roles. Most tellingly, she has stepped into Ai-

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In *Cry*, says Judith Jamison, who made the piece famous, Donna "just goes out and transcends everything I taught her."



"She researches everything before buying," says a pal, "from hair dryers to cereal. We call her 'Miss Consumer Reports.'"

ley's masterwork, *Cry*, the wrenching solo about the agony and hope of black womanhood. The Alley company does not designate its principal dancers, but when Wood solely inherited *Cry*, the dance world knew she had arrived. Wood, among the more popular and least neurotic first ladies in dance, learned the role in Jamison's living room. Recalls Wood: "We just pushed aside the furniture and got on with it."

In Europe she's all the rage, having performed Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* in Vienna and two Alley pieces with the Royal Danish Ballet. On home turf, recognition has taken a little longer. But there are signs. "Everybody now calls me Miss Wood instead of Donna," she says. "At first it made me blink. I thought it was kind of cute. Then I realized younger members of the company were actually looking up to me. That's when you suddenly realize that you've grown up in your profession."

Like so many overnight sensations, Wood has been working hard since childhood. Living outside Dayton, Ohio, the fourth of seven children in a middle-class family, Donna tagged tirelessly behind her three big brothers from gridiron to baseball diamond. "But," says her mother, Erma Lee, "the boys didn't want to be bothered with her." Instead, Erma enrolled her oldest girl in dance class to work off her energies in a ladylike way. Donna kept on playing football (and still enjoys a quick touch scrimmage with the stagehands on tour) but kept dancing too. At 11, she began studying with the Dayton Ballet on weekday afternoons, and during high school she spent six summer weeks with the Dance Theater of Harlem. After Donna's graduation at 16, her father, Frederick, now a vice-president of General Dynamics, gave her exactly two weeks to find a dance job in New York. The Joffrey and the American Ballet Theatre turned her down as too tall, but Alvin Alley actually cast her in a ballet before telling her she was hired. Her father moved Donna to Manhattan with all her worldly goods in the back of his Rambler.

Trained in classical ballet, Wood had to learn jazz, modern and ethnic dance with Alley and had so much fun she would forget to pick up her \$100 weekly check. "I couldn't believe they actually wanted to pay me to do this," she says. Ten years later that glee is still evident in her performances. On-stage Wood is outstanding for the



Donna gets a backstage buss from the boss, Alvin Alley. "She's a dream dancing, a fantasy that moves," he says.

strength and passion she brings to Alley's repertory of highly emotional roles. "If you're just doing steps," she says, "all meaning is lost." Job satisfaction, though, is crucial, since as an Alley dancer Wood makes only \$18,000 a year, while superstars like Cynthia Gregory are raking in some \$250,000. "I'm comfortable," maintains Wood.

She has no serious beaux ("I'm tired, and I just don't have time for anything steady") and devotes herself almost obsessively to fussing over her five-and-a-half-room West Side apartment. After a performance, where she is cheered and pelted with roses, Wood unwinds by scrubbing the bathtub or vacuuming, with jazz playing on her headphones. When everything is clean, she rearranges the furniture. "When I come home," says her roommate, dancer Robin Becker, "I never know where I'll find anything."

Every morning Donna drinks hot water with lemon juice and downs home-cooked bran muffins made with bone meal and brewer's yeast. Then as a warm-up she pedals the 50 blocks downtown to the Alley studio. For energy before a performance, she drinks a half cup of hot water with a tablespoon of molasses in it, and if that doesn't work, she does it again. "There are no formulas," she says of her regimen. "But I don't believe in killing your body or hurting yourself, because you only have yourself once. Once you kill it, it's gone." BARBARA ROWES

Newsweek



Photos © Jack Vartoogian

Wood in 'Fontessa' (with Gary DeLoatch) and in 'Cry': Always down to earth

DANCE

Ailey's Black Beauty

Donna Wood is to the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater what Suzanne Farrell is to the New York City Ballet and Natalia Makarova to American Ballet Theatre: she's the glittering body that magnetizes attention when she's onstage. Unusually tall (5 feet 8), she's built generously, with full breasts, a narrow waist, strong hips and powerful, shapely legs. She's also blessed with a lively, pretty face, and she has speed, agility and precision to match her statuesque beauty. She's the Herschel Walker of dance; if Heisman trophies were given to dancers, she'd be a sure winner.

Wood's large emotional range matches her physical prowess. In "Fontessa and Friends," Louis Johnson's funny new work for the Ailey season just concluded at New York's City Center, she is hilarious simply prancing around observing the madcap antics of her bizarre friends with unconcealed glee. She is convincingly lyrical in the pure classical style of Todd Bolender's "The Still Point," in which on swift feet and with mercurial moods she develops a complex portrait of a woman out of touch with her true feelings.

Brink: Her dramatic sense is equally acute—especially in Ulysses Dove's twelve-minute solo, "Inside," in which Wood 'ances the ordeal of a woman living through a terrible anguish that brings her to the brink of breakdown. Wood trembles, shivers and shakes uncontrollably, desperately fighting to exorcise the devil within. It is an awesome tour de force.

In whatever mood, Wood's dancing is always down to earth. In "Fontessa" she is marvelously vulgar as she strips down to a

sparkling rhinestone bikini and, with a wicked come-on twinkle, whips through a virtuoso burlesque number, complete with bumps and grinds and willing manhandlers. In an entirely different vein, she is just as earthy in "Memoria," Ailey's inspired tribute to the late choreographer Joyce Trisler. Sylphlike Maxine Sherman, with whom Wood shares the role, dances it with telling insubstantiality. Wood converts spirit to flesh; in chiseled movements a marble statue comes to life as a person, not a symbol.

Unexpected Lines: The Ailey company is essentially black, and Wood is the quintessential black dancer who responds to black music with a special ear. For Judith Jamison, Wood's predecessor as the company's leading lady, Ailey choreographed the brilliant solo "Cry," a concentrated twenty-minute tribute to black women. Jamison interpreted the role with monumental and mythic vision. In contrast, Wood has her feet planted in the soil as she flickers back and forth between slave and matriarch, coquette and queen, from Africa to Harlem. In black celebrations like "Blues Suite" and "Revelations" she shows off unexpected lines, vibrating to her own rubato, instinctively adding bewitching grace notes, composing her own harmony of body parts so that familiar music sounds fresh and familiar dance looks new.

One wonders what she's thinking about during those long intense solos in "Cry" and "Inside." "I'm not thinking," says the 27-year-old dancer. "I'm aware of how I want to go, how to command my space, how I want the audience to feel. The thinking takes place before I go out onstage. Out

there it's all feeling. If you wait until then to do your thinking, your energies all turn in and you can't send out at the same time."

She grew up in Dayton, Ohio, where she studied both classical and modern dance and basketball. The Woods had a full-length basketball court in their backyard because of her father and four brothers, who range in height from 6 feet 2 to 6 feet 11. Wood admits to having had a mean jump shot. Loyally, she goes back to Dayton every year to make a guest appearance. Offstage and up close she impresses you with her poise, her self-assurance and serenity. When she first auditioned in New York at 17, she was turned down by both American Ballet Theatre and the Joffrey Ballet on the ground that she was too tall. It's hard for black dancers to break into classical companies. But she harbors no bitterness. "When I joined the Ailey company I had already learned control," she remembers. "Now I had to learn how to let go."

Energy is high on Wood's priorities. It's one thing she says you cannot waste. "If you want the audience to see a hand or foot move, then you must be very clear. There's a way of throwing out an arm or stretching a leg that's direct, economical and energy-efficient. It's like pointing your finger at someone. Every other part of your body must be concentrated into that simple movement. If it's not, it's wasted energy and it can distract the audience."

To Wood, audiences are the other side of her artistic coin. "We care about them because they care about us. Otherwise they wouldn't be there. We're not up there for the audience to look in on. It isn't a one-way mirror. That's why you can't become totally self-absorbed. It's an exchange of energies. If people don't like what they see, I'll know and I'll try to do better next time. In fact, I'll try to do better next time anyway."

HUBERT SAAL

In her dressing room: No wasted energy

Bernard Gotfryd—NEWSWEEK



This is a Dream Season For an Ailey Discovery

By JENNIFER DUNNING

"Tonight's one of those nights when I'm dancing in everything," Maxine Sherman said happily the other day as she settled down to lunch before a long afternoon of rehearsals at City Center. She is performing with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and having one of those seasons dancers dream about. "I can never decide whether to rest or start the morning with a ballet class."

That day she'd settled for class. A long, lyrical ballet body line like hers doesn't just happen accidentally. Neither does the kind of dramatic nuance that Miss Sherman brings to a wide variety of roles, three of them in new works that have been company hits this season.

Tomorrow afternoon, she'll dance a hip city street kid in Talley Beatty's "The Stack Up," follow up in the evening with her poignant playing of the experienced, odd woman out in Hans van Manen's "Songs Without Words" and end the weekend as a nubile faun in Mr. Ailey's "Satyriade."

But that kind of variety was one of

the things that first attracted her to the Ailey company, with its mixture of modern dance, jazz and ballet; that and the chance to move her dancer's body in a special way. A native of Pittsburgh, she'd studied piano, acting and dance as a child and appeared as a supernumerary in the Pittsburgh Ballet Theater's "Swan Lake" and "The Nutcracker." At the age of 14, she moved on to the National Academy of Arts in Champaign, Ill., with summer trips East to attend the New York City Ballet-affiliated School of American Ballet.

"There was never a moment when I decided I wanted to dance," Miss Sherman said. "I just kept getting scholarships, and one day I thought: 'Whoops, I guess I'm going to be a dancer.'" Soon after, she saw the Ailey company perform. "And I knew I had to be able to move like that: like a wave, or water, and not ethereal ballet, which categorizes dancers so. It was a terrific challenge."

In 1977, the year after her graduation from high school, Miss Sherman got her wish and became an Ailey dancer. The next year she danced her first lead role, that of the drugged-out rock star in Mr. Ailey's "Flowers."

'A Fantastic Relationship'

"It was important to me that Alvin thought I was special enough and worked with me," she recalled. "We have a fantastic relationship. He respects me, and I obviously respect him. He helps me — in a way no other teacher or friend has — to extend my technique and to pull out what I was feeling in my personal life and bring it onto the stage. I felt I could really grow in this company, and I still do."

Being one of the few white dancers in the company has always seemed "inconsequential," as Miss Sherman puts it. What does bother her is the image that people seem to have of the Ailey company and dancers in general.

"I wish the dance world and people who watch dance would open up," she said. "The Ailey company is more than just a black dance company out there shakin' its hips. And dancers aren't the ignorant and naïve people that some recent books have made them out to be. I read. I go to the movies. I listen to music. I'm in love with my husband, Timothy Hunter — he's a lighting designer. We just got married. There is so much you can take in and use in a dance performance. Dance is about sharing."

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater will perform at City Center tonight at 8, tomorrow at 2 and 8 P.M., and Sunday at 2 and 7:30 P.M. Tickets are \$5 to \$25. The information number is (212) 246-8989.



The New York Times / Ruby Washington
Maxine Sherman

Dance: A Gala-Premiere at the Ailey

By ANNA KISSELCOFF

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has always given the best galas in town, and Thursday's benefit for the company at the City Center was no exception. It had a terrific world premiere by Talley Beatty titled "The Stack-Up" and a guest headliner, the pop singer Peter Allen.

Ailey benefits are distinguished by their family atmosphere — they are warmer and less snooty than others. Mr. Allen, it is true, comes from outside the dance world and he is not exactly on the spiritual wavelength that marks the Ailey company at its peak. He is, however, nothing if not a splendid communicator, and he certainly helped sell a lot of tickets.

Unlike other dance galas that have turned to pop stars for this purpose, this one integrated the guest and the home team in a one-time-only production number, "Continental American Suite." Mr. Allen was a good sport about it all — just about ready to make a gold-shod clown of himself as he cavorted around with the Ailey dancers. It all worked fabulously.

The program, which ended with an excellent performance of Mr. Ailey's enduring masterpiece, "Revelations," opened with "The Stack-Up." Here is one of the most exciting works to enter the Ailey repertory in many a season, and it shows Mr. Beatty as a veteran choreographer riding the crest of renewed creative inspiration. Those who know his urban-jungle classic, "The Road of the Phoebe

The Cast

THE STACK-UP, choreography, Talley Beatty; music, Earth, Wind and Fire, "Two Tons of Fun," Marvin Gaye and Grover Washington Jr.; decor adapted from "Under the Bridge" by Romare Bearden; costumes, Carol Vollet Garner; lighting, Tom Skelton. Presented by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at the City Center, 131 West 55th Street.

WITH: Marilyn Banks, Keith McDaniel, Gary DeLoatch, Carl Bailey, April Berry, Kevin Brown, Ronald Brown, Deborah Chase, Charles Exps, Nelsa Folkes, Ralph Glenmore, Norman Kaush, Deborah Manning, Sharrell Mesh, Maxine Sherman and Gregory Stewart.

Snow," will recognize the same vibrant pulse and capsulization of big-city rhythms. Now Mr. Beatty has, with sensational flair, captured the essence of the current street dances originating among black youth. Any one who has seen demonstrations of the "breaking" dances from Los Angeles or the street-corner virtuosity that some dancers display just outside Lincoln Center on late nights will marvel at the brilliance with which Mr. Beatty has abstracted their qualities.

"The Stack-Up" is a very "new" ballet, and it uses rap music by the group Two Tons of Fun as well as recordings by Earth, Wind and Fire, Marvin Gaye and Grover Washington Jr. Not the least of its virtues is the originality of the dynamic movement that Mr. Beatty invents for the Ailey dancers. Repeatedly, he plays upon the theme of wide-open jumps. Excitingly, a scissor-leg leap or a broad split in the air has an unexpected filip — a leg swung around with whiplash force, for instance.

As a title, "The Stack-Up" supposedly has something to do with what happens to cars on a Los Angeles freeway. Mr. Beatty gives us the human equivalent — layers of city folk, going their own way, some colliding emotionally. The dance breathes with the scent of the metropolis. The decor itself is magnificent — a projection inspired by "Under the Bridge," a painting by the distinguished artist Romare Bearden. Carol Vollet Garner's brightly hued stylized street-gear costumes, combined with the change of mood in Tom Skelton's striking lighting, help create the vibrant plunge into the first section — which is indisputably the best of the entire piece.

This first section is, in fact, light-years away from where the "The Stack-Up" piles up. In the end, it is a piece with an antidrug message. The outsider is a junkie, played with poignant jauntiness by Gary DeLoatch, who cannot connect with the young couples in love around him, or even a marvelously punchy street gang, danced with a whammy of a kinetic pulse by Deborah Manning, Norman Kaush, Ralph Glenmore and Gregory Stewart. The hero, Keith McDaniel, cannot be saved by his girlfriend, Marilyn Banks. Just as "Phoebe Snow" ends with a gang rape and a dead body held aloft, "The Stack-Up" offers a similar ending, with Mr. McDaniel in an amazing solo of disco-dance quivering disintegration.

This infusion of a message-scenario



Peter Allen with Mari Kajiwara rehearsing "Continental American Suite."

is not quite up to the level of the choreography itself. The power of the work comes from the movement, especially in the first section, and the staccato-like, pelvis-wiggling, high-kicking ensemble in the third episode. Mr. Beatty, with Ralph Farrington serving as his assistant, has given the Ailey company a winner, and its dancers are all magnificent.

Louis Johnson did a fine tongue-in-cheek job choreographing the Ailey dancers into Mr. Allen's act. The songs were all by Mr. Allen, and he made his grand entrance by popping out of a red grand piano. Six members of the Ailey company draped themselves around the piano as the women in his life. Most of their costumes

came from Ailey productions, and the show-stealer was Miss Banks, as a vamp slithering under that red piano, which obviously was Mr. Allen's co-star.

The real star was his uninhibited self. Carmen DeLavallade introduced him as a onetime youth who had fallen in love with the Ailey company when they dropped into his native Australia. As an encore, he sang "Not the Boy Next Door." Dian Sorel and Ula Hedwig were his vocalists, his own band was behind him in every sense, and other members of the Ailey company, some in rather short Diane von Furstenberg shifts, whirled in and out. Mr. Allen insisted on dancing, too.

Dance

DANCE VIEW

ANNA KISSELGOFF

The Spirit of Street Dance Pervades 'Stack-Up'

Walking past Lincoln Center recently one night after a performance, music and dance lovers were treated to another dance performance, on the sidewalk. A group of young men had placed their giant cassette-recorder on one of the tree-pots outside Alice Tully Hall. A thin mat was spread on the ground. It was clear this was as carefully planned a display as the programs that the passers-by had just witnessed inside the theaters.

Street performers are hardly new and it is to this venerable tradition that the four young men now harked back so knowingly. They were amateurs in the true sense, performing for the love of it, and yet they were overtly professional — not so much in their bid for money as in the quality of their presentation and polish of their dancing.

Their display was one of outstanding virtuosity. The energy was all staccato — remote from the more familiar jazz forms or even the disco dancing now become routine to all segments of American youth. No part of the body was taken for granted. These dancers were apt to lie down on the mat and dance with their heads as pivots.

This spirit of contemporary street dancing, particularly among young blacks, pervades "The Stack-Up," the dazzling new work by Talley Beatty that the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is presenting at the City Center. Without being a piece about street dancing, it manages to capture a rhythm derived from the street, one new to a dance company's stage.

None of this suggests that Mr. Beatty, one of the grand masters of jazz choreography, has simply co-opted a spontaneous expression. Quite the contrary, he has grasped its essence and filtered it through his own artistic imagination. Conceivably, one gets an even bigger charge out of the real thing, the new dances originating among young people in the clubs. These are vital outpourings in themselves — their vibrancy is often part of their rawness. Yes, but is it art, as they say. This is the question

any artist in any field encounters when he or she works with popular forms.

"The Stack-Up" represents a breakthrough. It is true it incorporates the familiar jazz-dance vocabulary that has marked much of the Ailey repertory and Mr. Beatty's earlier work. But there is also a new way of moving, swiftly paced. It is best seen as the equivalent of the "rap" music that figures among the popular recordings Mr. Beatty uses as collage score. In other words, "The Stack-Up" is a terrific stream of clever nonstop movement, accented, punchy, full of comment about itself as movement as well as upon modern urban life. Only an American choreographer and probably only a black American choreographer could have so brilliantly sensed the current tempo of the American metropolis.

"The Stack-Up" is a big-city work and what better symbol of the megalopolis is there than Los Angeles? The title reportedly refers to a way of life in Los Angeles — a stack-up of cars on a freeway. Mr. Beatty's collisions here are emotional. Perhaps it is no accident that the "breaking" dances, which originated in Los Angeles's black clubs, are felt in Mr. Beatty's "The Stack-Up." In his choreography, we sense those dances, with their quick darting movements, their spurts of kicks and jabs. It is the pulse of Mr. Beatty's choreography that renders "The

Stack-Up" exciting. And it is the movement quality that makes it different from "The Road of the Phoebe Snow," the 1959 urban-jungle classic that stands out as Mr. Beatty's best-known work.

Each of the two is a work of its time. Gang warfare was rife in the 1950's. The drug problem is Mr. Beatty's theme today. "Phoebe Snow," whose name referred to a train on the Lackawanna Railroad, has the more overt scenario. A boy and girl fall in love by the railroad yards, a ghetto playground without much play. The girl is subject to a gang rape. The music is by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. And like its music, the flavor of the choreography is rooted in a sophisticated jazz idiom.

"The Stack-Up" has a totally different feel. Again the music and dance are one. The recordings are by Earth Wind and Fire, Two Tons of Fun, Marvin Gaye and Grover Washington Jr. Again, there is a scenario with a victim. A young boy collapses before our eyes in a strobe-lighted disco solo. His body is held aloft, but his fate has been presaged by the earlier image of a junkie, isolated from the world around him and portrayed with fantastic hip poignancy by Gary DeLoatch.

Mr. Beatty's anti-drug message comes as a surprise. The first section of "The Stack-Up" suggests a plotless work. The urban mood, however, clicks on with a snap.

"Rather than co-opting a spontaneous expression, Talley Beatty has grasped the essence of street dancing and filtered it through his artistic imagination." (Anna Kisselgoff)

The backcloth is a projection adapted from Romare Bearden's painting, "Under the Bridge." The stage is filled with types, dressed flamboyantly in Carol Vollet Garner's stylized gear. Mr. DeLoatch, in silver pants, red shirt and red cap, is instantly visible.

At first glance, these figures look like Dunham types — the slouching, slinking denizens of urban scenes by Katherine Dunham, in whose company Mr. Beatty danced for many years. In a flash, he gives us his own 1982 original. The pace is markedly different. Marilyn Banks struts and does a split jump in the air, her leg swung from the front to the side. Repeatedly these exciting and new-looking leaps will erupt in the air. Keith McDaniel, as the young hero and Miss Banks's sweetheart, comes forward. At this point, the choreography's impact comes from its layers of dancers — whirling, rotating shoulders, punchy and flashy, defining themselves and, like two smirking, spikey high kickers (Maxine Sherman and April Berry), melting into a not very lonely crowd.

The most spectacular unit amid this bustle is a gang — Deborah Manning, Norman Kauahi, Ralph Glenmore and Gregory Stewart. They jab and shadow box, they wiggle, walk sideways and include an Indian-whoop sign amid a collage of gestures. Each group has its signature theme. And seemingly anything goes — ballet's barrel turns, jazz's contractions and vernacular dances.

The mood changes toward the more conventional in a series of love duets, for Miss Banks and Mr. McDaniel, Sharrell Mesh and Ronald Brown and other couples. Mr. DeLoatch loiters. When he helps out the gang on some partnering, he gets a contemptuous brushoff. Unable to connect with the community, he is seen holding his arm, the heroin addict folding up in despair.

The third section returns to the blazing ambience of the first. As the Two Tons of Fun rap "We're all rockin' it," the dancers rap in movement. It is all pelvis work, a cascade of higher kicks and pirouettes. Miss Sherman and Miss Berry lead the way beautifully. The stage becomes a disco as Mr. Gaye's voice urges "Get Up and Dance." Mr. Beatty then gives Mr. McDaniel a hallucinatory quivering solo of disintegration. Miss Banks tries to bring him under control. These more ordinary images are not quite up to the level of creativity that permeates the rest of the choreography. Nonetheless, Mr. McDaniel does a powerful job, looking very much in a cold sweat while the crowd moves heartlessly behind him. The end is a surprise. Two groups of dancers cross, Mr. McDaniel and Miss Banks run toward the bridge. The music stops abruptly. A body is held up, an accusatory casualty of the urban scene.

While there is no question of the importance of Mr. Beatty's statement, it is the way in which he makes it that gives "The Stack-Up" its impact. Social protest choreography is now rare in this country. And somehow Mr. Beatty never seemed to be narrowly in that category. He is rather a choreographer who has never divorced himself from the life around him.

In recent years, the very vital fragmentary pieces he presented have rarely coalesced into the more complete statements he produced earlier in his career. Whatever it was that was fermenting in his mind has now finally exploded with brilliance and depth in "The Stack-Up."

